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RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 6515
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 USNATO 000410

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TAGS: PREL NATO MCAP GG
SUBJECT: RFG: STAFFING THE NATO LIAISON OFFICE IN TBILISI

REF: A. USNATO 100
1B. AC/119-N(2009)0052

Classified By: DCM John Heffern. Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (SBU) This is a request for guidance. See para 8.

The Problem

12. (C/NF) Allies will discuss at the September 29 PermReps' lunch the inability of NATO to staff -- via Voluntary National Contributions (VNC) -- the NATO Liaison Office in Tbilisi, which Foreign Ministers agreed to establish last December. Mission recommends that Washington consider offering a VNC to staff the office.

The Background

13. (C/NF) In the aftermath of the Russian-Georgian war last fall and the decision not to offer the Membership Action Plan to Georgia and Ukraine, NATO Foreign Ministers decided at their December 2008 meeting to send a signal of support to the two countries by reinforcing the existing NATO offices in Kyiv and opening a new NATO liaison office in Tbilisi. The decision was announced in the ministerial communique.

14. (C/NF) When NATO began looking at how to implement the decision, however, it ran into a significant problem. As outlined in ref A, NATO had insufficient funds in its Civil Budget to actually hire NATO International Staff personnel to staff the office. A decision was made, therefore, that staffing the office would have to be carried out--at least in the near term--via Voluntary National Contributions (VNCs) from nations. (Note: NATO has used this mechanism in the past, such as during the initial stages of implementing the decision at the 2004 Istanbul Summit to create liaison officers for Central Asia and the Caucasus. While over time the positions were absorbed by the NATO International Staff, the personnel for these positions were initially VNCs. The United States even put forward VNC candidates for the positions, although in the end other candidates were chosen. End Note)

15. (C/NF) In March 2009, NATO distributed a list of requested voluntary national contributions for the NATO Liaison Office in Tbilisi (ref B -- emailed to EUR/RPM). Up till now, however, no nation has stepped forward with an offer of a VNC

that would allow the office to be opened. The IS believes that they need staff assigned for a minimum of a year in order to make the office viable.

¶6. (C/NF) With no visible progress on opening the office, several Allies are beginning to raise concerns that we will go into December's Foreign Ministerial having failed to carry through on the decisions reached the year before. The Latvian Foreign Minister sent a September 16 letter to NATO Secretary Rasmussen about the office (letter e-mailed to EUR-RPM). The Latvian PermRep also raised this issue at the September 23 meeting of the North Atlantic Council. The Estonian and Lithuanian PermReps joined him in asking for a PermRep discussion of the issue. In response, the Secretary General has placed this on the agenda for the September 29 PermRep lunch.

The Recommendation

¶7. (C/NF) Mission recommends that Washington offer a U.S. VNC to staff the office for a minimum of one year. The VNC could work on things such as the shared U.S.-NATO goals of helping Georgia reform its military and defense structures and policies. Equally important would be the political signal that would be sent, making clear that the U.S. and NATO remain committed to helping Georgia in its reforms and along the path to Euro-Atlantic integration. We should also recognize that a continuing failure to staff the office would probably be seen in Tbilisi, Moscow, and the capitals of Eastern Europe as a signal that NATO was walking away from

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its relationship with Georgia. As we approach the December Foreign Ministerial, we should work to ensure that ministers will be able to say that the decisions they took the previous year have been successfully carried out.

Request for Guidance

¶8. (C/NF) Request for Guidance: Mission requests guidance for use in the Tuesday, September 29 PermReps' discussion of the failure to staff a NATO Liaison Office in Georgia. If we are not yet in a position to formally announce a VNC contribution, we request that the guidance at least indicate that we are starting a process to identify possible candidates.

DAALDER